

# Faith, Ethics & Values

Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh



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## **Faith, Ethics and Values**

Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh

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## **Dedicated To Youth**

### **An Appeal**

The Sikh youth can feel great and happy by owning their glorious heritage, while the golden future is before them, if they sincerely believe in, understand and practice the Sikh philosophy. Unless the Sikh character is practiced by the youth in their daily life, how can non-Sikhs know that it is great to be a Sikh? If young people owing their allegiance to Sikh faith are addicted to drugs, alcohol, bad habits, and antisocial behavior as other youth are, how can they communicate to the people that Sikh faith and high character go together? We have to tread the path laid down for us by the Gurus and not allow ourselves to be derailed by the pressures of modern society. The firm decision of the mind that the right path has to be stuck to whatever the circumstances helps everyone greatly. It brings real peace and bliss which most of us wish to enjoy.

**Paramjit Singh**

Director  
Publication Directorate

## Table of contents

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Introduction	5
From the Author	6
Sikhism-A Revolutionary Faith	7
Decided to Become a Sikh	23
Why Do We Miss the Message of Gurbani ?	26
Sants as Service Bullocks	28
Are There any Sacred Days	30
Dating and Dancing	32
Anand Karaj	36
What about Inter Faith Marriage	49
How Much Alcohol May a Sikh Drink ?	52
Bare Headed Sikh in Gurdwara	58
No Amrit, No Kirpan for Me	60
Apostasy : A Great Dilemma	63
Are you a Sikh ?	67
Kirpan not Dagger	70
Sin of 'Breaking' Amrit	72
Why no palki in Darbar Sahib ?	74
Are the Janam Sakhis True?	76
Is mercy killing (Euthanasia) Allowed?	82
Virtues, Vices and Their Clash	84

## Introduction

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Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh, was born in Punjab, India on September 15, 1927. He was educated at Khalsa College, Amritsar and he obtained his Ph.D. degree from Ohio State University, USA in 1963. His last appointment was as the Professor and Dean at Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, India. Dr. Singh was inspired by the late Sant Teja Singh of Mastuana who was educated at Harvard and who devoted his life to Sikh missions. In 1984, Dr. Singh resigned from his job and began to devote his full time towards teaching Sikh religion to the Sikh youth. He has written many other books for the youth namely, Khalsa Generals, Teaching Heritage to Youth, Sikh Faith, Gems of Gurbani, Lesson Learnt & Sikh Sakhis for the Youth.

Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh is also associated with 'Akal Education Trust' of Baru Sahib, HP. He is senior Vice President of Kendri Sri Guru Singh Sabha. He is liked by one and all due to his selfless service and his commitment to the cause of Sikh religion and human welfare. Dr. Singh addressed students in the camps of Study Circle during more than 50 camps. Students feel satisfied after listening to him and getting genuine answers to their questions about Sikhism.

**Iqbal Singh**

Incharge, Head Office  
Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle

## From the Author

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Teaching is a highly rewarding profession. The peace enjoyed by a teacher while looking at the satisfied faces of the students and hearing the sincerely voiced 'thanks' cannot be described in words.

Here are, however, some of the lessons learnt by the author himself from the youth while teaching Sikh heritage to them. Mutual learning brought a great change in my thinking. I feel more committed and devoted to the faith than before I started participating in the Sikh youth camps in North America. Therefore, it is now my turn to say 'Thank you' to my students and friends.

I have always loved explaining gurmata philosophy and Sikh heritage to the youth. However, answering their searching and challenging questions was a great experience which changed my own life. The book, *The Sikh Faith - Questions and Answers* is the outcome of these discussions. In paperback form, it has been published in USA, Canada, India and Singapore. The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar has published its revised hard cover edition. Its Panjabi and Hindi versions have been published by Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle, Ludhiana, Panjab. I hope this small volume, which contains Gurmata lessons learnt by the author, will also be welcomed by the readers. The episodes have been written in the order that I remembered them. The youth will enjoy reading them and benefit from the lessons they teach. The Sikh community in general should also find these articles interesting.

I thank Dr. Pushpinder Singh for preparing this new illustrated version. I appreciate it, the illustrations have made reading more useful. May God bless him.

- Dr. Gurbakhsh Singh



## Sikhism-A Revolutionary Faith

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### The Revolutionary Thought

Guru Nanak created a revolution in the field of religion. He revealed a totally 'new' God, Who loves people of all faiths. The Guru also gave a new mission of life, that is, to accept all people as brothers and sisters irrespective of the name they adopt to love God. The philosophy and the code of conduct preached by the Gurus are summarized in this book.

#### a) All humanity is one

The first message of Guru Nanak, "There is no Hindu, no Musalman; we are all equal humans and are **all loved by God**," shook the people and the religious leaders of different faiths. The year is 1499. It was a revolutionary thought in the field of faith. He argued, "We cannot have two Gods, one who loves only the Hindus and the other who loves only the Muslims. God did not create Hindus or Muslims, He created humans. Of course, they are of different colors and of different forms in the same way as He created different kinds of flowers, all giving their own

nice sweet smell and adding beauty to nature. God, being the sole Father, the Creator of the universe, equally loves all humans, whatever their language, their culture, and whatever the Name (Allah, Ram, Gobind, Guru, God) they adopt to address Him"

*The belief of any religious group that they alone are entitled to go to Heaven and the followers of other faiths will go to Hell, was rejected by Guru Nanak.*

One can imagine how such thoughts touched the traditional people. The Brahmans had preached for hundreds of years that among the Hindus they were the superior most human beings. The fighters, called Kshatryas, were placed next to them and the third position was given to the business community. People serving the three higher castes were considered Sudras, the low caste, hence were believed unfit for Heaven. According to the Brahmans, all non-Hindus along with the lower castes were destined for Hell. Similarly, the Muslims considered *Bahisht* (Heaven) to be reserved for them alone. All non-Muslims were *Kafirs* destined for *Dozakh* (Hell).

However, the Guru denied that beyond this earth, somewhere else in the universe, there existed any particular places known as either Heaven or Hell to which our souls were headed. The reason most of us believe in religion is that after death we want to get admission to Heaven and are frightened of being thrown into Hell. The Guru said the goal of human life is not qualifying for admission into a non-existent Heaven or being scared of a mythological Hell. A person is in Hell when he ignores the presence of God within him and suffers from ego, hate, lust or anger. He enjoys the bliss of Heaven when he sings

the virtues of God and loves His children, the human beings.

Guru Nanak thus broke the barriers of faiths that had split people into mutually-hating sects and creeds. He preached that all people are equal human beings and none of them can be considered superior or inferior because of the variation in their color, race, culture or language. According to him a holy person is he who accepts all people as his classmates; that is, he considers himself an equal member (neither inferior nor superior) of the big class called human beings.

ਆਈ ਪੰਥੀ ਸਗਲ ਜਮਾਤੀ ਮਨਿ ਜੀਤੈ ਜਗੁ ਜੀਤੁ ॥

aa-ee panthee sagal jamaatee man jeetai jag jeet.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P.6)

The Guru decried the old Brahmanical rituals believed to help a man to reach Heaven. He said that adopting the creed of fake purity (something gets polluted if seen or touched by a low caste person), abandoning the family life for meditation, and reading scriptures to grasp the knowledge and intelligence therein, are of little use for realizing God. The path for realization of the goal of life is obedience to the Will of the Lord. In the first hymn of the Jap ji, the Guru says it in these words;

ਸੋਚੈ ਸੋਚਿ ਨ ਹੋਵਈ ਜੇ ਸੋਚੀ ਲਖਵਾਰ ॥

ਚੁਪੈ ਚੁਪ ਨ ਹੋਵਈ ਜੇ ਲਾਇ ਰਹਾ ਲਿਵਤਾਰ ॥.....

ਸਹਸ ਸਿਆਣਪਾ ਲਖ ਹੋਹਿ ਤ ਇਕ ਨ ਚਲੈ ਨਾਲਿ ॥

ਕਿਵ ਸਚਿਆਰਾ ਹੋਈਐ ਕਿਵ ਕੂੜੈ ਤੁਟੈ ਪਾਲਿ ॥

ਹੁਕਮਿ ਰਜਾਈ ਚਲਣਾ ਨਾਨਕ ਲਿਖਿਆ ਨਾਲਿ ॥

sochai soch na hova-ee jay sochee lakh vaar.

chupai chup na hova-ee jay laa-ay rahaa liv taar.....

sahas si-aanpaa lakh hohi ta ik na chalai naal.  
kiv sachi-aaraa ho-ee-ai kiv koorhai tutai paal.  
hukam rajaa-ee chalnaa naanak likhi-aa naal.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P.1)

God evaluates our deeds alone, and not merely our beliefs. The Guru made it clear that neither he nor any other prophet would be able to intercede at the time of final judgment, which would be based on actions only. Whether one was a king or a beggar, a so-called high-caste or a low-caste, a Christian, Hindu, Sikh or a Muslim would make no difference in the final assessment. He wrote, "Any person who loves God realizes Him."

God is nobody's private inheritance; nobody can claim a franchise on Him. Forcing and torturing the weak to change their faith and method of worship is anti-God. It is like threatening a person to force him to address his/her father as 'Dad' and not as 'Papa'. Such actions are disapproved of by God.

A person, whatever his caste, faith, or social status, who said that God lives in all human beings, was accepted by the Guru to be a holy human. A close friend of Guru Nanak of his childhood age was Mardana, a Muslim, born in a so-called low caste. He was addressed as Bhai (brother) by Guru Nanak. The hymns of more than two dozen devotees of God (*Bhagats*) from different religions and speaking different languages were included in the holy scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib, to guide the life of the seekers of Truth. As observed in the introductory paragraphs, the hymns of this holy scripture are meant for all people. However, sometimes it is mistakenly

considered to be a scripture for Sikhs alone. We know it well that chemistry, biology, and other sciences are meant not just for a country or a community but for anyone who wants to benefit from them. To learn and to benefit from the sciences, one is not obliged to be a follower of the scientists. One is not required even to identify himself as a formal scientist to take advantage of the knowledge provided by any of the sciences. Similarly, one is not required to believe in the Gurus or the *Bhagats* who wrote these hymns included in the Guru Granth Sahib, nor is one required to be a formal Sikh to take advantage of the path to God explained there. A rose is a rose called by any other name. God is our Father, our Lord; we all are His children, hence equal; of course, because of His Will, we have different cultures. Thus, there is only one faith for all the people; one may give it any name one likes. Rightly, this has been called a revolutionary thought for the modern man to adopt and bring peace on this earth.

### **b) God, The Father of All People**

So far, the preachers emphasized on conversion to "save" people of other faiths. They believed that their's was the only true faith and others were pagan faiths. However, Gurbani proclaimed that God is the Father of all humanity and not just for any one particular community alone. God is nobody's private inheritance. No one can claim a monopoly on Him. He belongs to everyone.

ਆਪਨ ਬਾਪੈ ਨਾਹੀ ਕਿਸੀ ਕੇ ਭਾਵਨ ਕੇ ਹਰਿ ਰਾਜਾ॥

aapan baapai naahee kisee ko bhaavan ko har raajaa.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 658)

The Almighty Lord can be worshipped through



innumerable languages and by innumerable names - Creator, Allah, Ram, Gobind, Guru, and God. All names are equal; no one name is superior or inferior. We may praise Him by any name and still gain acceptance by Him. Those who love him achieve the goal of their human life.

ਜਿਨੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇਆ ਗਏ ਮਸਕਤਿ ਘਾਲਿ॥

jinee naam Dhi-aa-i-aa ga-ay maskat ghaal.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 8)

The Guru cleared another big ignorance of the traditional thinkers. He stated that there was no place called Heaven nor any called Hell where, after death, people will go for eternity. Gurbani explains that living according to the Will of the Lord, keeping Him always in mind and singing His Virtues, is being in Heaven. Hell is suffering from ego, lust, greed, anger, jealousy or slander, etc.

ਤਹਾ ਬੈਕੁੰਠੁ ਜਹ ਕੀਰਤਨੁ ਤੇਰਾ.....

tahaa baikunth jah keertan tayraa.....

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 749)

ਨਰਕਿ ਪਰਹਿ ਤੇ ਮਾਨਈ ਜੋ ਹਰਿ ਨਾਮ ਉਦਾਸ॥

narak pareh tay maan-ee jo har naam udaas.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 1369)

God is our Father; we all are His children, hence equal. No one of us by birth is superior or inferior to others.

ਤੂੰ ਸਾਝਾ ਸਾਹਿਬੁ ਬਾਪੁ ਹਮਾਰਾ॥

toon saajhaa saahib baap hamaaraa.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 97)

This makes the Sikh faith unique and fundamentally

different from other faiths, wherein it is believed that only followers of their own faith will be saved through their prophet, while rest will be sent to Hell. These radical principles established by Guru Nanak founded for whole humanity a new faith which has been accepted to be the faith of the new age.

To preach and practice his mission, Guru Nanak founded the institutions of Sangat and Pangat. All people participate as equals, without any kind of discrimination on the basis of one's faith, caste, color, or country. They sit together, pray together, and eat together as children of the same Father. They conclude their prayer with a request "May God bless whole humanity"

Sikh Prayer

ਤੇਰੇ ਭਾਣੈ ਸਰਬੱਤ ਦਾ ਭਲਾ

### Basic principles

#### i) Practice love, not hollow rituals

Guru Nanak went to a large number of Hindu religious places and met Pundits (scholars), Sidhs (who perform miracles), and Yogis. He told them that the mindless and hollow rituals done for exhibition had no value with God. They were like a counterfeit coin, which looks genuine but is rejected because it does not contain the specified precious metal. Similarly, God rejects all rituals practiced by the people who have no sincere goodwill for other human beings.

There is no benefit to the soul from undergoing self-inflicted tortures such as abstaining from food, bathing in ice cold water, remaining surrounded by fire for a long

time, keeping silent for long periods of time or standing continuously on one leg or in any other awkward posture. In those days Yogis and Sidhs performed such acts to claim their superiority over the common people.

The Guru did not approve of the belief that our ancestors who are already dead, could be helped by giving alms to the Brahmans (the so-called high caste people). This was simply a means of some members of the priestly class to gain ascendancy over others. If this were acceptable to God, the rich would always be guaranteed a better berth even in the next life. Guru Nanak made it categorically clear that people would be judged by their own actions. They would not be benefitted by the rituals performed by their children or grandchildren. He said that people themselves are the abode of God. Therefore, He knows what is in our minds. One can cheat people but cannot cheat Him. Guru Nanak, therefore, preached that showing sincere love and goodwill (not for exhibition purposes only) towards other human beings was the surest way of obtaining peace here and hereafter.

## ii) Deeds alone are valued

Guru Nanak also visited many Muslim religious places including Mecca, Medina, Baghdad, and other shrines. The biggest question of those days, "Who is superior, a Muslim or a Hindu?", was asked of Guru Nanak by the Kazis (Muslim Judges). Guru Nanak's response, "Everybody without good deeds will repent.", satisfied everyone and could not be challenged or criticized by any of them.

ਪੁਛਣ ਫੋਲਿ ਕਿਤਾਬ ਨੇ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਵਡਾ ਕਿ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨੋਈ॥

ਬਾਬਾ ਆਖੇ ਹਾਜੀਆ ਸੁਭਿ ਅਮਲਾਂ ਬਾਝਹੁ ਦੇਨੋ ਰੋਈ॥

puchhan phol kitaab nau  
hindoo vadaa ke musalamaanoe.  
baabaa aakhay haajeeaa subh  
amalaa baajhahu dono roee.

(Bhai Gurdas Ji, Var 1-33)

Guru Nanak preached that God does not identify people by their sectarian religions such as Christians, Jews, Hindus or Muslims. In his hymns, he observed, "God judges us by our deeds and full justice is delivered to every one in His court."

ਕਰਮੀ ਕਰਮੀ ਹੋਇ ਵੀਚਾਰੁ॥ ਸਚਾ ਆਪਿ ਸਚਾ ਦਰਬਾਰੁ॥

karmee karmee ho-ay veechaar. sachaa aap sachaa darbaar.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 7)

The Guru also said, "For my spiritual guidance, I do not believe in Hinduism or Islam and nor do I follow their rituals. My path is love for the Almighty, Who is the Lord of our bodies and souls. He is addressed as Ram by Hindus and Allah by Muslims."

ਨਾ ਹਮ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਨ ਮੁਸਲਮਾਨ॥ ਅਲਹ ਰਾਮ ਕੇ ਪਿੰਡੁ ਪਰਾਨ॥

naa ham hindoo na musalmaan.  
alah raam kay pind paraan.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 1136)

ਜਿਨੀ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਇਆ ਗਏ ਮਸਕਤਿ ਘਾਲਿ॥

ਨਾਨਕ ਤੇ ਮੁਖ ਉਜਲੇ ਕੇਤੀ ਛੁਟੀ ਨਾਲਿ॥

jinee naam Dhi-aa-i-aa ga-ay maskat ghaal.  
naanak tay mukh ujlay kaytee chhutee naal.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 8)



Guru Nanak also challenged the prevailing discrimination due to sex. Women were regarded as inferior and incomplete human beings, and hence were given a very low status in society. A Hindu woman was not permitted to wear the religious thread (*Janju*). She was considered an obstacle in the path of God. That is why mystics, who wanted to devote their lives to realizing God, did not marry. Celibates, known as *Jatis*, were considered superior and were honored by the family men. Guru Nanak strongly disapproved of this thought. He asked how women could be rated inferior when they give birth to all men including the Kings to whom people bowed their heads.

ਸੋ ਕਿਉ ਮੰਦਾ ਆਖੀਐ ਜਿਤੁ ਜੰਮਹਿ ਰਾਜਾਨ॥

so ki-o mandaa aakhee-ai jit jameh raajaan.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 473)

Guru Nanak, therefore, showed the same respect to men and women and equally welcomed them to participate in all social and religious functions.

The hymns of Guru Nanak and of all Bhagats (religious sages) stress the presence of God in every human being. They say that any act that hurts another person is wrong, because it displeases God residing in him. Any act, which helps the other person, is good because it is liked by God.

### (iii) Live honestly

While on his preaching missions in Panjab, Guru Nanak stayed with Bhai Lalo, an honest carpenter, instead of with the corrupt village official, Malik Bhago. Malik

invited the whole village for a feast at his house but Guru Nanak did not attend. Malik called him and asked him to explain the reasons for not eating the sumptuous food served by him. Guru Nanak bluntly told him, in the presence of the respected village people, that it was "human blood" and not wholesome food that was being served to the people.

ਹਕੁ ਪਰਾਇਆ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਉਸੁ ਸੂਅਰ ਉਸੁ ਗਾਇ॥

hak paraa-i-aa naankaa us soo-ar us gaa-ay.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 141)

ਜੇ ਰਤੁ ਲਗੈ ਕਪੜੈ ਜਾਮਾ ਹੋਇ ਪਲੀਤੁ॥

ਜੇ ਰਤੁ ਪੀਵਹਿ ਮਾਣਸਾ ਤਿਨ ਕਿਉ ਨਿਰਮਲ ਚੀਤੁ॥

jay rat lagai kaprhai jaamaa ho-ay paleet.

jo rat peeveh maansaa tin ki-o nirmal cheet.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 140)

Stunned by these fearless remarks, Malik demanded an explanation. The Guru told him, "If a cloth is stained by blood, we call it dirty. Your earnings are stained by the blood of the poor from whom you extract money illegally and forcibly. How can your mind be pious or clean? It is only honestly earned money that is like the sweet milk, which I enjoy at the house of Bhai Lalo. Taking what is due to others is as repulsive as pork is to a Muslim and beef to a Hindu." This awakened the sleeping soul of Malik. The Guru similarly exhorted Sajjan (nicknamed Thag), a robber and murderer living in the village of Tulumba in Multan, Pakistan, to earn his livelihood through honest means. He was also advised that one has to pay for one's actions in the end. Sajjan gave up his vices

and became a true *sewadar* (service man) of the people.

#### (iv) Physical renunciation of no avail

Guru Nanak undertook an arduous journey to visit the Sidhs in the Himalayas. The Sidhs, who remain celibates, were surprised to see the Guru, a family man, there in the snowy mountains. They questioned him about the people down below in the plains. The Guru said, "The people are wondering who will protect them from evil. All the Sidhs who obtained donations from them in return for promises of help and religious guidance, have run away to the snowy hills."

ਫਿਰਿ ਪੁਛਣਿ ਸਿਧ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਮਾਤ ਲੋਕ ਵਿਚਿ ਕਿਆ ਵਰਤਾਰਾ॥

ਸਿਧ ਛਪ ਬੈਠੇ ਪਰਬਤੀ ਕੋਣ ਜਗਤਿ ਕਉ ਪਾਰ ਉਤਾਰਾ॥

phir puchhan sidh naanakaa maatlok vich kiaa  
varataaraa.

sidh chhap baithay parabatee kaon jagat kau paar  
utaaraa.

(Bhai Gurdas Ji, Var 1-29)

The ego of the Sidhs was cut down to size by this astute reply of the Guru. The Guru also exposed the Sidhs' hollow claim that remaining celibates made them better than married people. He asked them, "How dare you say that you are superior or are nearer to God than family men when you beg for food and depend on them for your sustenance?"

#### (v) Service is true worship

At Jagan Nath Temple, Puri, India, Guru Nanak told the priests that instead of worshipping the stone images of the gods, they should strive to become one with God's

pervasive nature. The correct way to worship Him is to love other human beings who are His creation and in whom God actually resides.

Wherever Guru Nanak went, people greeted him in large numbers and all leaders respected his new religious thought. He decried hollow, meaningless rituals and wanted people to realize God by observing His existence in every human being and everywhere in nature. Guru Nanak collected the writings of those Muslim *Pirs* and Hindu *Sants* who had also realized, that the same God is present in every human being. These hymns were later included in the Guru Granth under the title *Bhagat Bani*.

The technique Guru Nanak adopted to preach his faith can be understood from the above incidents (Sakhis) of his life. To learn more about the interesting and revealing incidents of the life of Guru Nanak, the reader may refer to one of the many books on this subject. For preaching his mission, Guru Nanak Dev spent about two decades visiting different religious places in India and adjacent countries.

### Unique Miri-Piri Principle

#### a) Miri-Piri

'Miri' refers to social and political life while '*Piri*' refers to religious beliefs. Guru Nanak preached that the two have a symbiotic relationship and must move hand in hand to serve society effectively. Religion provides the motivation for serving people while political thought creates a social structure for providing actual service to

society. In other words, the common objective of the two institutions, religion and politics, is providing service and justice to the people. These two privileges are considered their birth right.

Guru Nanak, however, found that people having political power or religious authority were draining the blood of the weak instead of serving them with honesty and sincerity. The major pillars of the faith, love for the people, commitment for service, and practice of truth were missing from the minds of the men in power. Guru Nanak raised a loud and forceful voice against these antisocial elements.

ਰਾਜੇ ਸੀਹ ਮੁਕਦਮ ਕੁਤੇ॥

raajay seeh mukdam kutay.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 1288)

The rulers and their officials behave like blood-sucking beasts.

ਕਾਦੀ ਕੂੜੁ ਬੋਲਿ ਮਲੁ ਖਾਇ॥ ਬ੍ਰਾਹਮਣੁ ਨਾਵੈ ਜੀਆ ਘਾਇ॥

ਜੋਰੀ ਜੁਗਤਿ ਨ ਜਾਣੈ ਅੰਧੁ॥ ਤੀਨੇ ਓਜਾੜੇ ਕਾ ਬੰਧੁ॥

kaadee koorh bol mal khaa-ay.

baraahman naavai jee-aa ghaa-ay.

jogee jugat na jaanai anDh.

teenay ojaarahay kaa banDh.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 662)

The Muslim Kazis (Judges) are corrupt, the Brahmans suck the blood of the innocent, and the Yogis mislead people. They themselves don't know the path for peace and are responsible for the problems of the people (instead of being helpful and sympathetic to them).

The significance of these efforts of Guru Nanak can

be properly understood only when one keeps in mind that all kinds of privileges were reserved for only the rulers; the subjects had no rights, not even to express their hurt feelings.

Guru Nanak gave new directions to those who wanted to be truly religious persons or political leaders. He preached:

(1) ਰਾਜੇ ਚੁਲੀ ਨਿਆਵ ਕੀ

raajay chulee ni-aav kee

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 1240)

(2) ਪੂਜਾ ਕੀਚੈ ਨਾਮੁ ਧਿਆਈਐ ਬਿਨੁ ਨਾਵੈ ਪੂਜ ਨ ਹੋਇ॥

poojaa keechai naam Dhi-aa-ee-ai

bin naavai pooj na ho-ay.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 489)

(3) ਪ੍ਰਭ ਕੇ ਚਾਕਰ ਸੇ ਭਲੇ॥ ਨਾਨਕ ਤਿਨ ਮੁਖ ਊਜਲੇ॥

parabh kay chaakar say bhalay.

naanak tin mukh oojlay.

(Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, P. 211)

(4) ਵਿਣੁ ਸੇਵਾ ਧ੍ਰਿਗ ਹਥ ਪੈਰ ਹੋਰ ਨਿਹਫਲ ਕਰਨੀ॥

vinn sevaa dhrig hath pair

hor nihaphal karanee.

(Bhai Gurdas Ji, Var 27-10)

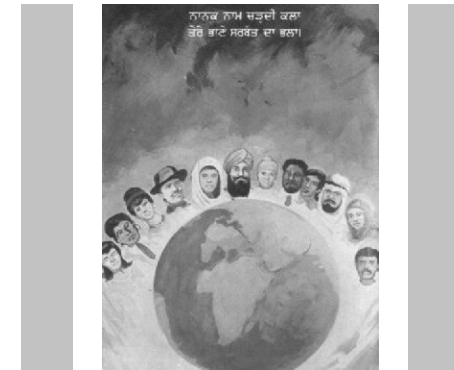
(i) A person, who is a king, is bound to deliver justice to the people because it is his duty to do this.

(ii) & (iii) The duty of a religious person is to do worship; worship means to remember God and love people, His children; there is no worship without love and service to people. Service is the path to the success of

human life.

- (iv) Cursed are those who don't do service to people.  
Without service all their actions are meaningless.

To summarize, Guru Nanak preached that religion is not a set of rituals. It is practiced only when one's belief is actually put into practice for the welfare of the people. Otherwise, religion is nothing more than a theoretical concept for mental exercise and leads to bickering and argument.



## Decided to Become a Sikh

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What goal was fixed for the Panth by  
Guru Nanak when he founded sikh faith?

"When the sun, Nanak, arose all the mist and darkness (ignorance) in the world vanished" Bhai Gurdas Var 1 Pauri 27, The Var refers to the problems of the people and the solutions introduced by the Guru to help people.

Bhai Gurdas explains that humanity lived in peace, but later it got into trouble by splitting itself into high and low castes; it also grouped itself into hierarchical sects of yogis and *sanyasis*. People were further divided into many faiths because they worshipped different deities and each deity was claimed to have superiority over the others. When the Mughals arrived, they intensified the problem by forcing Islam on the Indians already divided into multiple faiths.

Bhai Gurdas, in his poetic style, then states that the earth was unable to bear the 'weight' of sins committed due to mutual hatred among the people and the practice of falsehood everywhere. The earth, therefore, begged God

to send a saviour, and God deputed Guru Nanak for this job. This defines the mission of Guru Nanak in authentic words.

This mission (to unite the split humanity, teach people to give up hatred and practice mutual love) was assigned by God to Guru Nanak. "The contributions of the Gurus are well known to all of us. We can, now, understand the great significance of the first sermon of Guru Nanak - "*no one is a Hindu and no one is a Muslim*" The message of the sermon for us is not to divide society into different creeds, castes or any other classes because they are all man-made differences. God creates us equal; no one is inferior or superior; no one is alien, we are one big family having our common Mother-Father, God.

We have also studied the institutions (*sangat*, *pangat*, common *baoli*, common *sarovar*, and common *gurbani*) that were introduced by the Gurus and made popular to remove our attitude of feeling inferior, superior, or different from other people. This defines the goal intended by the Gurus to be achieved through these institutions.

Finally, there is the founding of the institution of the Khalsa, when people were urged by the Guru to give up their differences because of their previous faith (*dharm*), caste (*kul*) etc. All people were welcome to drink *amrit* from the same bowl and live as equals in every respect. They were accepted as the spiritual sons and daughters of Guru Gobind Singh and Mata Sahib Kaur. They were to have, therefore, the same common names of Singh and Kaur for all men and all women, respectively. The duty assigned to the Khalsa was of saint-soldiers (Legions of the Lord of Peace) to protect

human rights of the weak, uproot tyranny, and preach truth.

"We find that Guru Nanak was deputed by God to unite the split humanity and create mutual regard among the people. It was achieved during the Guru-period. To continue to spread this message, to maintain peace and serve society, the tenth Nanak passed on the responsibility of the Guruship to the Khalsa. The mission of Guru Nanak, thus, is an ongoing process. It is for us to see what we can do to convey this message to every human being keeping in mind the religious, social, and political beliefs of the people. We have to convince people that they are equal members of the large family, we call humanity. Hating anyone or considering a person inferior is a sin. This is the message of Guru Nanak for maintaining peace in the world."

"Dear youth, we see that this is an ongoing assignment given to us. All of you are welcome to discuss this issue to decide your duties/responsibilities during your life to help achieve the mission laid out by the Gurus. Now it is up to us to define what we should do, and what we can do, to maintain love and peace among the people."





## Why Do We Miss the Message of Gurbani ?

I learnt an important lesson in this regard from my young son. When he was of about four years old, he fell down from the roof while attempting to fly a kite and became unconscious. We could do nothing but pray for his life. After about 10 days, he was discharged from the Hospital without suffering any permanent damage to his brain. We thanked God for His grace and we decided not to let him fly a kite again.

After some years, we shifted to a new house with a fairly big yard where the children could play and run about. One morning, I was scared to find him with a kite. With anger in my words, I asked his mom, "Why did you purchase him a kite again? Have you forgotten your prayers offered during his hospital days?" The usual answer moms give was, "He was insisting for many days; I purchased it with the condition that he will fly the kite only in the yard."

That day we were to attend a family function in our neighbour's house where children would not be permitted. To reinforce the message, I wrote on a paper in Punjabi, "I will not go on the roof to fly my kite, I may fall down and

break my leg." In a commanding tone, I told him to write it 10 times before he touches his kite. When we returned after about an hour or so, he was on the roof flying his kite. It is not possible for me to put in words what went through my mind.

I enticed him to come down by saying, "Sonny! Come down and look what we have brought for you." Controlling my anger, I asked, "Did not I ask you to write ten times?" Without the feeling of any guilt for not caring for my directions, he said, "Daddy! You may count it, I wrote 11 times." At the same time, he picked up the paper and put it in my hands. He completed the writing assignment without getting the message contained in it.

Overcome by his innocence, I could not say anything to him. I took a chair under the shade of a tree in the yard. I analyzed the whole episode and this is what I realized.

"We recite *nitnem* daily but we usually miss the message meant to direct our daily activities. However, we feel satisfied for having performed our religious responsibility as a Sikh. The result is that after many years of *gurbani* reading, the weaknesses and shortcomings in our minds continue to keep us away from the peace we are supposed to enjoy in our lives. This benefit is possible only with the grace of God, hence a Sikh is directed to recite *gurbani* keeping his mind tuned to the message and also pray for His grace."

ਦਸ ਦਿਸ ਖੋਜਤ ਮੈ ਫਿਰਿਓ ਜਤ ਦੇਖਉ ਤਤ ਸੋਇ ॥

ਮਨੁ ਬਸਿ ਆਵੈ ਨਾਨਕਾ ਜੇ ਪੂਰਨ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਹੋਇ ॥੧੦॥

(SGGS Page 298)

*I searched in all directions to look for God, and found Him everywhere. However, one can keep his mind tuned to His virtues only if he is blessed by Him.*







## Sants as Service Bullocks

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"People treat *sants* as service bullocks to work for them. A farmer takes good care of his bullocks, offers them fodder, and provides them full comforts of life. He yokes them to pull the cart, plough the field, and do other jobs. The farmer justifiably becomes the owner of the crops produced by the labour of the bullocks.

"In the same way many people do physical *sewa* to serve the *sants* and expect to obtain the fruit of the holy life the *sants* live.

This does not work that way in the field of faith. Association with a preacher can only guide one to learn the path of *gurmat*. However, one has himself/herself to follow the code of Sikh conduct to become a virtuous person. One must regularly recite *gurbani*, try to understand its message and live one's life accordingly. Giving money and food to the *sants* (but not listening to their teachings) does not help one to control one's mind."

Both lessons, reading *gurbani* and practising its message, must be adopted with devotion by a person himself. The motivation for living a virtuous life is

provided by the recitation of *gurbani* with love and adopting its teaching in daily life. The *sakhis* related to the Gurus tell us that real *sewa* is listening to them and obeying them. A devotee benefits to the extent to which he actually practises the message of *gurbani*.





## Are There Any Sacred Days

The management of the gurdwara in Dallas, Texas, USA, conducted a one-week Sikh youth camp every year. I was also invited to participate in that camp. The camp was inaugurated after the Sunday morning session in the gurdwara. Therefore, I decided to stay in the gurdwara to have *gurmat* discussions with *giani ji* and learn from his experience. I was very much impressed with his understanding of *gurbani* and Sikh philosophy.

*Giani ji* said, "To begin with I preached that *Sankrant* (first day of the Bikrami month), *Pooranmassi* (full moon), *Massya* (no moon), and other such days are believed to be sacred in Hindu philosophy and not in Sikhism. These particular days depend upon the position of the sun and moon, which are considered gods by Hindus and, therefore, are worshipped by them. *Gurmat* rejects this philosophy, stating that *those who worship these days as sacred are idiots*:"

"My repeated sermons every month reduced the number of the Sikhs, who attended gurdwara on the

*Sankrand* day, from more than 120 to about 50. Awakened by the actual outcome of my negative statements, I gave up this approach and revised my sermons."

Anxiously, I interrupted, "Do you now say these are sacred days for the Sikhs also?"

He continued, "**No, listen.** Now, I give the same message in positive words. *sangat ji*, it is a sacred day today for all of us because we have found time to enjoy *gurbani kirtan* and reflect on its message for us. May God grant you the full benefit of this sacred day! The benefits we obtain, as you know, depend upon, not the day or the date we visit gurdwara but upon how attentively we listen to *gurbani* and take advantage of its directions. You can enjoy this benefit not only on the *Sankrand* day but also on every day whenever you visit gurdwara.

"Therefore, you do not have to wait one full month for this sacred day. You can obtain the benefit of a *Sankrand* visit every time you come to the gurdwara and listen to *gurbani*. Being Sikh, we must take full advantage of our life by attending gurdwara as often as possible. This way we can receive the benefit of many sacred *Sankrand* days during each month, not just on one day only."





## Dating and Dancing

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Why do parents not let their grown up children date? They feel that they are responsible enough so the parents can guide them but cannot prohibit them from going with their friends. Is dating prohibited in the Sikh Faith?

Let us first understand "What is dating?" The dictionary meaning is to have an appointment, especially with a person of opposite sex. It is understood that the two want to socially interact to know each other with the objective of choosing a life partner. Sex is assumed to be a part of dating because the ultimate aim is to get married. Rather sex is considered essential, of course wrongly, to seal their relationship. Dating and mating have become synonymous. Additionally, raping is often alleged during dating. We read about date-rape cases very often.

The major change people are aware of is that sex has become a more common part of dating activities than in the past. In addition, pre-marital cohabitation is becoming more and more widespread. From these changes some people generalize that a process of

liberalization or moral decay must characterize the evolution of dating.

Dating, a sophisticated word of the western culture was used to represent a sincere and pious friendship among the un-married youth. However, the major change in the dating regime is that pre-marital intimacy of various kinds -- going steady, engaging in pre-marital sex, living together before marriage, having known other sexual partners before the spouse -- is occurring at an earlier age. Further, it has been defiled by the dishonesty of the partners.

The undeniable fact is that laxity in moral discipline has brought more illegitimate births. Observing social and/or moral discipline is the only way for saving youth from "ruining their lives."

The youth need to be cautioned that lust, anger, greed, and other vices overpower an individual, and force one to do what one knows should not be done. It is always good to keep away from a situation where there is a likelihood of being caught under pressure of anyone of them. Why create a potentially harmful and degrading situation?

To justify dating, one may argue, "I'm smart. I know the consequences. I won't do what other silly youth do and get caught." But what the youth do not realize is that probability of "accident" occurring increases if you choose to take risks. To illustrate this notion, author asked a youth why every gas station displays the notice "Turn the engine off before dispensing gasoline." All replied in one voice, "The gas may spill and create fire." Though they did not know of any gas station catching fire, they agreed that those instructions must stay. After citing this,

they were informed we have thousands of examples when dating resulted in pregnancy, ruining the life not only of the youth but also their parents. Still, many youth believe, "It will not happen to me." What one does not realize is that even big hearts break under pressure. Hence the advice: Take no risk: Do not tread on that path at all.

Being friendly is important for a Sikh youth. He/she should have good relationship with all her/his peers, regardless of the gender. Of course, not with those engaged in dreadful activities like consuming alcohol, drugs and so on. Some friends are close, others are not so close. Regardless, one should never have the idea of misusing the friendship.

When one is adult and ready to find a spouse, he/she should be open and frank with the parents to choose a life partner and solicit their help and guidance in making a decision. Why ignore their well-intentioned, advice for a better future? However, parents should never force their child to marry in a situation unwanted by her/him.

### **Dancing**

Dancing is a mode of entertainment in western countries. Sikhism applies the general test mentioned in the Scripture to any entertainment, namely, "Avoid that which causes pain or harm to the body or produces evil thoughts in the mind." (SGGS Page16) Dancing with partners of the opposite sex is likely to cause sensuous thoughts, for intimate bodily movement and arouse the lower passions.

However, cultural dances like Bhangra, Gidda,

Tiranjjan etc. are not forbidden, but these should not be performed in the presence of Guru Granth Sahib. Such dances are meant for social occasions or festivals and have no religious significance. There are other religious dances which are done by the Hindus (as for example Ras-Lila), and also by Muslim Sufi mystics. Such dances are not permitted in Sikhism. What the Guru permitted was 'the dance of the mind', and not of the body. The Guru says:

**"O my mind, dance before the Guru;  
If you dance according to the will of the Guru  
You will gain happiness,  
and the fear of death will vanish."**

(SGGS Page 506).

This kind of dance is the result of spiritual ecstasy, and is free from physical jerking and gymnastics.

Similar is the Sikh attitude to Discotheque. Disco is a blend of physical movements related to loud pop music. The lights in the hall or the room are deliberately kept dim to enable the partners to get closer to each other. As disco is likely to arouse sexual feelings, it is not permitted to the Sikhs. Dances purely for the promotion of physical health or fitness are not taboo.





## Anand Karaj

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The ceremony by which a man and a woman become a couple, husband and wife, is known by different names in different communities. Major names among them are marriage, wedding, Nikah, Viyah, Shadi, Parnay, etc. The Sikh name for this social event is *Anand Karaj*.

*Anand Karaj* means a function which provides bliss, delight and tranquility. Marriage is *Anand Karaj* because the two persons, a man and a woman, join together to live a holy life of peace and happiness leading to the realization of the Almighty Lord. This way they jointly walk on a path which helps them to achieve the mission of human life.

According to Gurus, marriage is one of the most important responsibilities of mankind. Not to marry or to pledge celibacy has no religious significance. Such a lifestyle does not make one a holy person as claimed by some of them. Marriage, even from a worldly perspective, is a natural function of human life.

## Significance of Marriage:

In the modern world, marriage is not much more than a social contract and entertainment. There is little essence of purity, cooperation, and fidelity. There is marriage one minute and possibility of divorce the next minute.

In America and Europe, establishment of family courts for divorces proves that these countries have not been able to set ideals of marriage that will assure righteousness, honesty, compromise and fidelity between the partners. These virtues are essential to provide tolerance, happiness, patience and contentment in married life. Instead of changing their habits and behavior to adjust and accommodate to their spouses, the partners experience restlessness and wander like a bumblebee. Each individual has his/her own way of living, own likes and dislikes without regard for those of the spouse. Such personal weaknesses do not let the two live together with “one mind,” which can create a firm foundation for a successful marriage. Further, an easy access to divorce weakens the ability to make compromises.

According to Gurmat, marriage is not merely the joining of two physical entities but a meeting of two minds and more importantly the meeting of two souls. Physical love is determined by external beauty which is like a passing shadow. It is not wise to base a life-long relationship on such transient things as beauty.

The Guru recommended the marriage to be based not only on the union of the two minds but also on the union of the two souls. In other words, Anand marriage is two individuals becoming one in mind and soul. Love of soul does not fade away with the fading of physical



beauty.

The couple endeavors to harmonize their Atma, souls, with 'Parm-atma' or we may say to merge their souls with GOD (Parmatma). The couple promises to follow Gurmat and to love and live a truthful life. According to Gurmat philosophy, to abandon or renounce the world and family life means avoiding life's real struggles. Parvarti Marg (married and family life) does not allow a person to wheel and deal. It does not permit dishonest earnings, involvement in immoral / illegal deeds, to serve a vulgar or low character person for bread and butter, or waste away life in pursuit of vices.

### **Marriage Ceremony of The Sikhs:**

Though it is a great religious event in the life of a Sikh, it is often seen that some formalities performed in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib are completely opposed to the principles of the Rehat Maryada. Yet, it is claimed that "*the Anand Karaj was performed exactly according to the Gur Maryada.*" Is there a greater ignorance than this? Non-Sikh practices need to be avoided by every Sikh in order to maintain the essence of true *Anand Karaj*. Due to lack of proper direction and able preachers, many *Anand Karaj* ceremonies are taking place that are not *Anand Karaj* in the real sense. In reality Sikhs observe many Hindu rituals believing them to be Sikh formalities required for the marriage ceremony. For example, *Jaimala* and *Sehra Bandi* are purely Hindu customs wrongly adopted by some of us. Reading of *Sehra* poems in the sangat during the *Anand Karaj* is not a Sikh way of giving advice to the couple considering the bride's family to be inferior is an anti-Sikh belief. If we

observe these non-Sikh customs, then the only difference between the two marriages will be that in Hindu marriages the couples walk around a fire while in Sikh marriages they walk around Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Yet, we claim it to be a Sikh marriage.

### **Anand Karaj Act:**

Legislation of the *Anand Karaj* ceremony was done only recently in 1909. Because of the strong social pressure of the majority community and active efforts of Brahmans, *Anand Karaj* was a forgotten ceremony. During the British Raj, Sikh weddings were performed in general by the Brahmans. The couple went round the sacred fire four times and Ved mantras were sung by a Brahman to solemnize the marriage.

After the Guru period, when the Mughal government ordered the killing of the Sikhs and gave rewards to the killers, the Sikhs left the villages and moved out to safe places in jungles, hills and forests. People sympathetic to the Sikhs, but Hindus at heart, managed the Sikh Gurdwaras and the properties attached to them. They introduced Hindu rituals which over a period of time were considered Sikh practices. During the British Raj, these hereditary custodians, called Mahants, of the Gurdwaras, were made owners of the Gurdwaras and the properties connected with them. Unlike their ancestors they were not devoted to holy way of life. They adopted immoral lifestyles and did not care to provide religious services to the community. This enraged the Sikh community and they started a movement to get rid of the Mahants as well as the Hindu rituals from the Gurdwaras. However, the Hindu



community considered the Sikhs to be a sect of Hindu faith. The Brahmans did not want the Sikhs to get out of their fold. The Singh Sabha movement, through its educational process and political strength, convinced the British government that Sikhs are a sovereign nation and are not Hindus. Maharaja Ripudaman Singh of Nabha State, Sunder Singh Majithia, and Bhai Kahn Singh played a key role in this struggle and got Anand Marriage Act passed in 1909. This gave *Anand Karaj*, the Sikh marriage ceremony, a legal status. It also legalized the *Anand Karaj* ceremony of the Sikhs performed earlier than 1909.

### **Concept of Lavan:**

It should first be mentioned here that the *Lavan*, was not composed to be recited for the celebration of the Sikh marriage. Its purpose is spiritual and it guides a Sikh on the path of the “marriage” of the soul (the bride) with God (the husband). Gurus have used all aspects of daily life to explain and convey the Gurmat message. Many social functions such as birth, engagement, marriage, death etc. have been used as examples to explain the principles of the Sikh faith. Similarly, the 15 days of the moon, the seven days of the week, 12 months of the year, different seasons of the year, 35 letters of the Gurmukhi alphabet etc. have all been employed as references to preach the Gurmat message.

A bride, for her marriage, has to bear the stress of alienation from her parent's family and developing respect for the members of her husband's family. Similarly a Gursikh is to live a married life with full respect and regards for the Guru, and remaining detached

from the worldly pleasures. While living a family life the couples do not get happiness by achieving their mundane desires but by practicing the path of Gurmat, *sewa-simran* life.

The Sikhs believe in the Guru's word (Gurbani) for directions in living their life. Gurbani is an eternal knowledge for them and they renounce the sins mentioned in the Gurbani. Further, they dwell upon His Name and practice righteousness. A mutual respect creates a spiritual bond; it is the first step for a successful marriage.

The married couple, or spiritual “bride”, upon developing the above mentioned qualities will qualify for the grace of God, the “husband”, and attain divine realization.

Guru Ram Das, the fourth Nanak, employed the Indian custom of four *Lavan* for marrying a bride to the groom. Using this metaphor, he wrote this hymn consisting of four stanzas to explain the spiritual marriage of the soul with God. This is the mission of human life as prescribed by the Sikh faith

The meaning and message (not the sentence-wise translation) of the hymn is given below.

Each *Lanv* starts with the invocation, “God, I am obliged to You, for Your Grace.”

- i) The first *Lanv* thanks God for providing the devotee the guidance of the Guru who engaged him to love the Lord. The lucky person, devoted to God, enjoys the bliss of His love and this keeps all the sins away. Nanak says, this is the beginning of the “marriage” of the soul with God. As the first *Lanv* (the first circumambulation), signals the beginning of the

marriage ceremony, the act of devotion sets one on the path of God realization.

- ii) As a result of devotion, one enters the next stage of meeting the Lord, devotion to Him gets rid of his ego, the “dirt”, and makes his mind clean. It is then filled with the awe (respect and regard) of meeting the Lord. This makes him free from all fears. The devotees, in association of the holy sing His virtues and find God very close to them. They realize God pervading everywhere in the universe, within themselves and without.
- iii) People who don't care for worldly charms develop a desire to meet the Master. These fortunate persons, in the association of holy people, utter His virtues and realize the Lord. By His Grace, holy people meditate on the Lord and find Him echoing in their hearts. This third step commits them to the love of God and keeps them away from worldly charms.
- iv) With the realization of the Lord, the devotees achieve bliss, everlasting peace and equipoise. They find Him to be lovable and “sweet.” The wish of meeting the Lord is fulfilled because of their day and night devotion to His Name. God Himself plans this function of “wedding,” and it fills the “bride” with immense joy and pleasure. This is the fourth step which completes the union of the soul with the ever-alive Lord.

By adopting the metaphor of four circumambulations made by a couple for their marriage, the Guru wrote a hymn having four parts for the “marriage” of the soul with the Lord. The bride has to give up her old lifestyle lived at her parents house to

successfully settle into the grooms family. Similarly, a person has to give up ego and love of worldly charms and get devoted to the love of God to enjoy spiritual bliss with Him. This is realized with the Grace of God.

### **Code of Conduct:**

A Sikh must marry only a Sikh, regardless of their caste, race or nationality. However, it is good for a Sikh to have good social relations with all persons, irrespective of their faith. Whereas, interfaith friendship is desirable, interfaith marriages are not permissible because they cannot be functional. Marriage requires the couple to live as “one soul”. Further, “one soul” cannot practice two faiths. Faith is not just merely a belief but a way of living for achieving the mission of human life.

The following social aspects need to be kept in mind by the Sikhs for deciding the marriage of the Sikh youth:-

### **Caste:**

Sikh religion does not believe in the caste system. To give importance to the previous caste (before becoming a Sikh) of a Sikh is opposed to the principle of the Sikh faith. Anyone who takes Amrit no more belongs to any caste but becomes a member of the joint family system that is Khalsa.

### **Singh and Kaur:**

It is important to use Singh with the boy's name and Kaur with the girl's name on wedding cards and also when they are announced in the Sangat. The name of the caste should never be attached with the words Singh or Kaur.

**Child Marriages:**

It is prohibited to marry a boy or a girl in their childhood. They should be physically, mentally mature in their conduct .

**Engagement:**

Engagement is not necessary. If one wishes, girl's parents may invite families and relations for this function to be held in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. No Hindu customs should be observed during this engagement or during *Anand Karaj*.

**Date of marriage :**

After consulting both parties any suitable day may be fixed for the wedding. It is wrong to consider the rise or setting of some stars, solar or lunar day, in determining a date for marriage. Sikhism does not believe in the holiness or otherwise of such days. Gurbani says that all days are equally good. Therefore, consulting an astrologer for selecting a day for a wedding is not permissible for a Sikh.

**Alcohol:**

Use of alcohol is strictly forbidden for a Sikh .It has been witnessed that many families ignore the above advice. Sometimes a generous use of alcohol is made during marriage and other happy functions. One who disobeys the Guru's advice cannot claim himself to be a Guru's Sikh. If the Sikhs observe the Guru's teachings on all social functions, it will bring peace to them and also raise the image of the Sikh community. It will also save the youth from drug use.

**Dance:**

It is not becoming of Sikhs to invite professional dancers. They do not reflect good moral image. It is an

uncivilized show. Marriage is a very serene, sacred and serious religious ceremony of the Sikhs. The two, *Anand Karaj* and professional dances cannot go along together. It is sad to see Sikh men and women hand in hand dancing on the streets while going to the bride's house.

**Jaimala (Garland) ceremony:**

Jaimala has been copied from the custom of ancient Swyamber, selection of the groom by the bride from a group of contenders by garlanding him. It is a complete marriage in itself. Jaimala has no significance in a Sikh Marriage.

**Superstitions:**

All Sikh functions should start with the Ardas before the Almighty and thereafter they have no room for superstitions, omens etc. One must stay alert from being influenced by such traditional rituals and customs.

**Making Demands (Dowry):**

This is another evil which has crept among the Sikhs. The groom's parents particularly those coming from affluent families demand cash, jewellery, properties, clothes, cars etc from the bride's family. It causes many problems in finding suitable matches for the girls. According to Gurmat, selling a girl (accepting money for marrying her) is also prohibited. It has become a serious social evil and the Sikh community should make a united effort to stop these non-Sikh practices.

**How the Ceremony Is Performed****Setting up of seats:**

It is often seen that a separate seat is set for the bride and groom for their *Anand Karaj*. This practice is opposed to the principle of equality of Sangat and respect for Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The couple should come to the

Guru in humility to receive blessings for their married life. Hence to set up a special soft mat (blanket) for them to sit on is wrong.

#### **Sehra:**

Groom wearing a *Sehra* or *Kalgi*, and bride wearing a veil in Guru Darbar are both opposed to Gurmat. Therefore this practice should be avoided.

#### **Supporting Bride during Lavan:**

Many friends and relatives stand to support the bride during *Lavan*. It is inappropriate. Bride and groom should walk around Sri Guru Granth Sahib on their own without support. This custom has its roots in child marriage. It also can be traced to the ritual of giving a girl in charity. Both are prohibited in Sikh faith.

#### **Showering of flowers:**

The practice of showering the bride and groom with flowers during the fourth *Lavn* is becoming very common. It must be avoided. To shower flowers on human beings with flowers in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib is to reduce the respect for the Guru.

#### **Use of Garlands:**

It is inappropriate to garland the bride and groom in the presence of Sri Guru Granth Sahib. However, it is okay if on behalf of the Guru, the management lets the Giani bless the couple with a garland after the *Anand Karaj* ceremony is over.

#### **Sehra / Sikhya Reading:**

*Sehra*, generally a description and appreciation of the family members of the couple, should not be read in the presence of the Guru Granth Sahib. The same applies to *Sikhya* reading. Only Gurmat advice (Sikhya by a Sikh

preacher) is recommended.

#### **Maintaining Discipline:**

Talking in the Darbar hall during the ceremony is undesirable and is disrespectful to the Sangat and the Guru. Gurbani should be listened to with due respect and full attention.

#### **Superstitions:**

Generally, *Amrit Vela* (early morning) is the most appropriate time for *Anand Karaj*. But to think that it must be completed before noon is Brahmanism. Gursikhs are advised not to believe that afternoon is inauspicious for such a function. If one wants, the ceremony may be performed in the evening. The principle of the Sikh faith is, *Sai Ghari Sulakhni* ... meaning anytime is a good time when one remembers God.

#### **Mutual respect:**

When the groom goes to the bride's house he should not expect a special respect and treatment from the bride's family members. They should co-exist as equal members of the Khalsa Family.

#### **Veil:**

A Sikh woman should not use a veil being a daughter-in-law in her husband's house. She should live like a daughter of the family. Sikh *Maryada* and veil do not go together.

#### **Observing special days:**

Keeping fast on days such as *Karva Chauth*, or observing other Hindu rituals like *Rakhi*, *Tikah*, *Guga-Puja*, *Sangrand*, *Masya* etc. is prohibited for Sikhs. Such dates / days are not sacred or in any way special in the Sikh faith.

### **Birth in the family:**

To rejoice on the birth of a boy but feel sad or inferior on the birth of a girl is against the principles of the Sikh faith. The birth of a child (boy or girl) should be accepted as a blessing of the *Akalpurkh*.

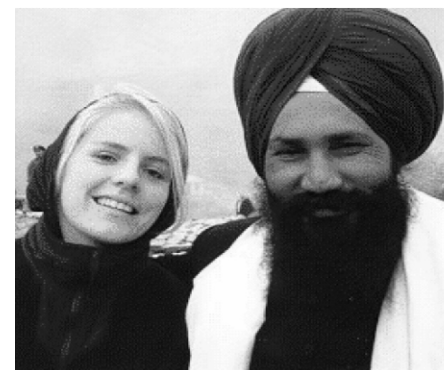
### **Remarriage:**

In case of death of either spouse the other partner is allowed to remarry. Remarriage is conducted in the same manner as the first *Anand Karaj*.

### **About Family planning :**

In olden times, the problem of family-planning did not exist. Even today in areas where population is scanty and resources adequate, family-planning is not necessary. This does not mean that excessive indulgence in sex becomes desirable. The Gurus told their followers to exercise self-control and to regulate sex sensibly. The Gurus recommended the middle way between self-indulgence and abstinence. Excessive sex was taboo as it led to sorrow and sickness.

It is for the couple to decide whether they want family-planning or not.



### **What About Inter Faith Marriage**

There should be no racial bias according to Sikh faith; hence, there is no racial bar against a marriage. Regarding interfaith marriages, it should be well understood that they may be performed by two or more ceremonies but such marriages will not be happy ones. Religion is not just a collection of beliefs to be understood but a path of life one decides to follow. Two spouses cannot simultaneously walk on two different paths, i.e. practice two faiths and still remain together as a couple. Otherwise, it is literally a marriage of convenience and not a marriage of minds and hearts. It is not a true marriage where both partners cannot jointly practice their faith, the mission of their life. Without practicing faith, we are no better than animals.

In case the two belong to different faiths, before they marry they must decide which faith they are going to follow. It may be remembered that conversion for marriage does not mean a change of belief, but it is for a worldly advantage. Such a wedding may soon create problems. Here are two case histories from a dozen

interfaith marriages that I know. Each has its own lesson for us to learn.

I was invited by the New Jersey *sangat* for a weeklong seminar there. My host was a white lady married to a Sikh. During an informal conversation at her house, she narrated her experience of their marriage. It is rare to find such honest and sincere people. What she shared with me is retold below in her words.

“My husband is a great human being. While working for him as his secretary, I liked him. We got married, even though my British parents did not agree with it. Later, when they found my husband to be a nice and noble man and also financially well off, they reconciled with our marriage. They now visit us regularly. Before our relations became normal with them, we started facing other problems.

The problem of naming our children was easy to overcome. We agreed to give them both Punjabi and Christian names. The other problems, however, continue. When we go to the church, none of us really benefit from it. He does not believe in Christianity and he just sits there to be with me. My mind remains constantly occupied with the idea that I am forcing one gentleman to sit there for nothing. The same thing is experienced at the gurdwara where our roles are switched. I do not understand Sikh sermons recited in Punjabi. He knows that I am there waiting for the function to be over.

The third problem is regarding the faith of our children. Should we raise them as Christians or as Sikhs? It bothers me most and it also seems to have no solution. He says, “I can raise them as Christians. However, as a true Christian, I feel it is a sin to raise the children of a

Sikh as Christians. If we do not teach them any faith that also is a sin. I am really under great stress.”

We discussed the topic of interfaith marriages quite often during the days I stayed with them. When, I asked her what I should tell the youth about it, she summarized her experience in two sentences. “If you love a person of a different faith, be a sincere friend but do not marry that person. By marriage, you will ruin the true meaning of life for both.”

There is a different experience of interfaith marriage as well.

A European lady is married to a Sikh who cuts his hair. She studied Sikh faith and had observed the Sikh culture before her marriage to him. She not only accepted the Sikh philosophy and culture, but also practiced it sincerely. She even taught Sikh heritage to the youth at the camps, of course, with some Christian element. One day, when I visited them for a Sikh youth camp, she gave a pleasant surprise to me by asking, “I want to become an *Amritdhari* Sikh. I wish my husband joins me. Please convince him to stop cutting his hair and also take *Amrit*.”

The conclusion I draw from these two case histories is that one must marry within one's faith. In case of an interfaith marriage, they must, before their wedding, join one faith and sincerely live that faith to have peace and achieve the mission of human life.







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## How Much Alcohol May A Sikh Drink ?

“Is drinking permissible to the Sikhs ?

If so, then how much ?”

Where is it mentioned in Guru Granth sahib?

Two different answers are commonly offered :

- i. No, it is not allowed. The *Rahit Maryada* prohibits it.
- ii. It is not prohibited. Tobacco alone is included in the list of the four cardinal sins.

### According to the *Rahit Maryada*

It is correct that drinking is not included in the four cardinal sins, and this is the reason why some Sikhs think that drinking is not prohibited. There are some minor sins, which we may call omissions, mentioned in the *Rahit Maryada*. Use of alcohol and other drugs is included in this list. A person, who commits any one of these omissions, stands charge-sheeted (*tankhahia*). A *tankhahia* is not required to re-take *amrit*, but he has to request the *Panj Pyaras* for being excused for his omission.

### According to Those Who Drink

Those who drink argue that no Sikh strictly follows the *Rahit Maryada*. Everyone of us has one or the other short-coming.

For example :

- i. Many Sikhs do not recite *Gurbani* regularly.
- ii. Many Sikhs dye their hair.
- iii. Almost all Sikhs give and take dowry, or even demand it !

All these are included in the list of offences. Then why is it that only drinkers are singled out at every stage for condemnation ?

Further, they say that *Gurbani* does not debar drinking. They quote Guru Nanak :

ਬਾਬਾ ਹੋਰੁ ਖਾਣਾ ਖੁਸੀ ਖੁਆਰੁ ॥

ਜਿਤੁ ਖਾਧੈ ਤਨੁ ਪੀੜੀਐ, ਮਨ ਮਹਿ ਚਲਹਿ ਵਿਕਾਰ ॥

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 16.

“Friend ! to taste of other than these is to ruin bliss

Such gormandizing as produces torment to the body, And fills with foul thinking the mind.”

According to them, it is only the misuse of alcohol which is harmful, and hence prohibited. Surely, no one, not even a non-Sikh, should get drunk and lose his self-control, because it is harmful to both body and mind. However, they say, having a social drink, or taking alcohol when one is tired and exhausted, and needs a “tonic,” cannot be considered *drinking* which is prohibited in the *Rahit Maryada*.

Both sides agree that drinking too much and losing self-control is wrong and undesirable.

## What About Social Drinking?

Regarding social drinking, let us consult *Gurbani*, which specifically refers to drinking. The following two quotations give a clear judgement on the issue.

ਜਿਤੁ ਪੀਤੇ ਖਸਮੁ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਦਰਗਹ ਮਿਲੈ ਸਜਾਇ ॥

ਝੂਠਾ ਮਦੁ ਮੂਲਿ ਨ ਪੀਚਈ ਜੇ ਕਾ ਪਾਰਿ ਵਸਾਇ ॥

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 554

Come what may, do not drink alcohol. It makes one ignore God and get punished in His Court. (It gives only a temporary charm, intoxication. *Naam*-intoxication gives everlasting peace / pleasure).

ਸੁਰਸਰੀ ਸਲਲ ਕ੍ਰਿਤ ਬਾਰੁਨੀਰੇ

ਸੰਤ ਜਨ ਕਰਤ ਨਹੀ ਪਾਨੰ ॥

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1293.

“Gentlemen do not drink alcohol, even if it is prepared from *Ganga-jal* (something considered highly sacred which cleanses pollution.)”

This advice of *Gurbani* should be acceptable to all Sikhs, *amritdhari* or not. However, some still argue, “We live in this world of friends and relatives, whom one cannot give up. One may have to occasionally yield to pressure from friends. This should not be considered a lack of commitment.” Actually hidden behind such pressures from 'friends' is the feeling of their own guilt. They know that drinking is not a good habit. By making their friends drink they want to overcome that guilt. Then they can console themselves, My friends drink, so they cannot ask me why I drink.”

## What About Alcohol In Medicines?

### *Alcohol in Medicines*

There is another argument offered to justify drinking. Most of the liquid medicines use alcohol as a carrier, and these are not prohibited for a Sikh. Therefore, small quantities of alcohol taken for medical purposes, digestion of food or getting over fatigue, etc., cannot be prohibited.

From *Gurbani*, we find an answer to this as well. *Gurbani* warns against indulgence in many things which form the routine in the life of man, and are even considered necessary. It says :

ਰਸੁ ਸੁਇਨਾ ਰਸੁ ਰੁਪਾ ਕਾਮਣਿ ਰਸੁ ਪਰਮਲ ਕੀ ਵਾਸੁ ॥

ਰਸੁ ਘੋੜੇ ਰਸੁ ਸੇਜਾ ਮੰਦਰ ਰਸੁ ਮੀਠਾ ਰਸੁ ਮਾਸੁ ॥

ਏਤੇ ਰਸ ਸਰੀਰ ਕੇ, ਕੈ ਘਟਿ ਨਾਮ ਨਿਵਾਸੁ ॥

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 15.

“Man is engrossed in the taste of gold, silver, woman, fragrant substances,

Horses, soft beds, mansions, sweet-tasting meals, flesh food :

With all these tastes engrossing the body, how may the *Naam* find a lodging therein ?”

In other words, how can one love God, if one is possessed by desire for gold, silver, women, horses, palaces, sweets, meat, etc. ? We all know that it is not the use of the above things as such that is disallowed, but the craving for and indulgence in these things that is not approved by *Gurbani*. Similarly, it is not alcohol or any other food as such which is prohibited in *Gurbani*, it is the reason for which it is taken that is not approved. We do

not have a craving for medicine, we have to take it for our health. On the other hand, we have a craving for alcohol, because of its intoxication (for pleasure and enjoyment). And this is the distinction between taking medicine and drinking alcohol, even if it is in small quantities.

Sometimes, a person also drinks, not because he likes it, but because he wants to satisfy his ego. The image of modern society is that the so-called high-class people drink. Therefore, drinks have to be served at parties to show that one belongs to this 'high-class', and be accepted as its member in their social circle.

Both these excuses for drinking, viz., pleasure and ego, are decried in *Gurbani*.

It must also be added that mere abstention from drinking is not enough to make one a good person. It could even boost one's ego with the feeling, "See ! I am great I do not drink." On the other hand, a man who drinks may be truthful, honest and devoted to the service of society. The emphasis here is on the instructions of *Gurbani*, regarding the consumption of alcohol by a Sikh, and is not to pass judgement on drinkers or non-drinkers, based on this sole criterion.

Not only the Sikh *Rahit Maryada*, but also health scientists warn that the use of alcohol is harmful both for body and mind, hence it should be avoided.

People start drinking alcohol for the fun of it, but inevitably end up as its slaves. Millions have become alcoholic and ruined not only their own life, but also the lives of their whole family. They all started by taking only a little alcohol, just for 'medicinal value.'

Yes, some people may be rare exceptions because of their body chemistry or self-control. But should they

be the role model for a Sikh ? A sensible decision is, according to Bhai Gurdas, not to follow the few, who have not been hurt. He writes :

"If someone escapes injury in a fall from the roof, it is not right to start jumping from the roof for fun. If Ganaka (a prostitute) was saved, one should not, therefore, take up prostitution as a profession. If a thief is seen moving about unpunished, one should not take it as a licence for house-breaking. Hence, one should not misguide oneself following such wrong logic."

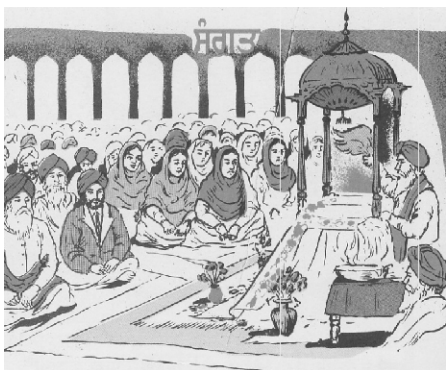
One should practice *Naam Simran* day and night. In this way, one will get in tune with God and follow His Will, and the desire for alcohol and other drugs will cease. Everyone, sooner or later, realises that drinking is a hindrance or an obstacle in the way of God-realisation. If one regularly recites *Gurbani*, one will discover true happiness, instead of the temporary gaiety alcohol or other drugs give.

Let us show gratitude to our Guru, who gave us the injunction in *Gurbani* : Love the *true wine* God's Name, by craving only for It. Nothing else is of any avail.

Kabir, the door of salvation is narrow,  
Like the one-tenth part of the mustard seed.  
How can the soul,  
Which has become bulky like an elephant,  
Pass through it ?  
If man meets such a Guru,  
Who becoming mightily pleased, Shows mercy,  
Then spacious becomes the gate of salvation.

Guru Granth Sahib, p. 509





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## Bare Headed Sikh in Gurdwara

**Can a Sikh come to the Gurdwara bare-headed?"**  
**"Where is it written in Guru Granth Sahib?"**

"Yes, it is written in the same hymn in which it is stated that one should come to the gurdwara wearing clothes. I have never seen any Sikh coming to the gurdwara without clothes. I always find everyone dressed properly. This means they have read that hymn that a Sikh must come to the gurdwara in proper dress. I am sure if one has read the second part of the hymn that wearing clothes is essential to visit the gurdwara, he cannot miss the first part, which says that covering one's head is also an essential requirement for visiting the gurdwara. I, therefore, assume that if a person wearing clothes on his body insists to enter the *dewan* hall without covering his head, he is deceiving himself."

Dear readers, the game-book only states the rules of the game and not the uniform of the team that decides to play that game. The manager of the team decides the uniform. *Gurbani* reveals *gurmat*, the spiritual lesson, and the philosophy of life to be adopted by a person of any

religion or of none. It is not supposed to mention anything about the dress code a devotee of a specific religion should follow. Guru Gobind Singh decided the dress code for the Sikh faith, and all Sikhs have to accept it. Anyway, wearing a head cover at sacred functions is a worldwide culture, not just an Indian, or a Sikh culture.

It will surely interest the reader that wearing a turban is a practice as old as the written history of humankind. It was an essential garment in the west also. The Old Testament mentions the requirement of tying turbans by the devotees. In the so-called advanced western culture, which does not always respect traditional values, a bride at the time of her marriage still feels honored to cover her head and face by a veil. The requirement of covering one's head is not peculiar to the Sikh faith; it is an ancient worldwide culture of the civilized people





## No Amrit, No Kirpan For Me

A friend of mine once drove me a long distance from Toronto to a Sikh youth camp in Ottawa. He wore a turban and did his *Nitnem* regularly. Only one aspect of our thinking, hence also of our living, was different. I was always seen with my *Kirpan* over my shirt, while he was without one.

On our way, this subject came up for discussion. He said, "I want to take *Amrit* and be a 'full' Sikh. I am, however, turned off when I see some of my friends who are *Amritdhari* Sikhs and wear *Kirpans*. They disrespect the Guru and they disregard their vows taken before the *Panj Pyaras*. Some of them tell lies, cheat, do bad things, drink alcohol publicly, and even steal gurdwara funds. I live a clean honest Sikh life. I have never told a lie or cheated anyone during my business dealings. I feel I am a better person without *Amrit*. Hence I think 'No *Amrit*, and no *Kirpan* for me.' In our society, being an *Amritdhari* actually means being a *thug*. If I take *Amrit* and wear a *Kirpan*, people will also assume me to be one of them. Scared of that label, I do not dare to take *Amrit*. You know,

I recite my *Nitnem* daily and commit no sin."

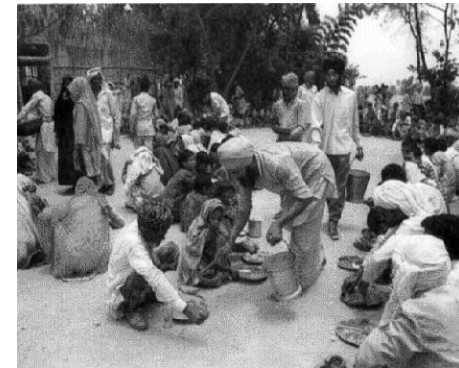
After a short silence, he continued, "Tell me, is taking *Amrit* still necessary for me?" Finally, I thought of an answer, "Sir, surely you are a great Sikh, and there is no doubt about it. Most of the Sikhs in the community also agree with this. They respect you and your good life. Actually that is why it is necessary for you to take *Amrit*. It is only then that the correct image of an *Amritdhari* will be known to the people. Further, you will provide a good role model for them also. Some *thug* Sikhs will feel embarrassed and may change. Others will be criticized by the Sikh community and considered hypocrites. Is it not a good way to build the image of the Sikh community and provide self-esteem for the Sikh community?"

My experience with such Sikhs tells me that it is simply reluctance on the part of many Sikhs that keeps them non-*Amritdhari*. Such persons, who take courage to go in for *Amrit*, later confess that ignorance was the cause of their reluctance. Earlier, they feared that they may not be able to live up to their vows. However, it was no problem to practice the Sikh *Reht*. Rather, it helped them to move straight on to the Sikh highway and it stops them from taking wrong exits.

Each such Sikh I met had his own reasons for being happy after taking *Amrit*. "Whenever there was a function in our family, it was very hard for me to justify my not drinking liquor. Now, a few words, *I have taken Amrit*, are more than enough to save me from repeated pressures of my friends. Further, I do not feel guilty for disregarding the requests of almost everyone at the function and they do not feel disrespected if I do not agree to join them."



Another lady said, "Now, we enjoy every evening. Earlier, a friend or two might come and start drinking and bothering us many times a week." Another person felt that he started enjoying his regular life only after taking *Amrit*. "Many times in our society, we waste this precious life just sitting and talking trash. When you want to leave, your friends force you to continue to sit by asking, "*Ki Kahli hai? - What is the haste?*". Now I leave after saying, 'It is *Rehras* time. We have to recite it together in our family.' By saying this, I get rid of their pressure to force me to waste my time there. His wife continued, "If I find some people hanging on unnecessarily after a friendly evening, I request everybody to enjoy the *Rehras* to be recited by our daughter. Every person thinks of an excuse to leave us."



## Apostasy : A Great Dilemma

### Increase in incidence of apostasy in youth

Why are Sikhs discarding their articles of faith in Punjab, whereas it should be an honor to wear turbans?

Some years back, it was rare to find a Sikh without a turban. Now being bare-headed is considered a symbol of a forward-looking 'Sikh', i.e., a modern 'Sikh'. Such youth believe that wearing a turban is a custom of the olden days, and an orthodox practice, hence their embarrassment to attend their school / college wearing a turban. Some persons remove their turban for no other reason but just to conform to the majority and keep step with the members of this new wave. Explosion of scientific knowledge is the major cause of the erosion of the love for the faith in case of all religions. Accumulation of wealth and availability of innumerable ways for worldly pleasures are also responsible for it. On top of it, social discipline has lost its hold on the minds of the people and society has become highly permissive.

"During the Khalsa period, particularly, the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, there were no formal preachers to



educate people about the Sikh philosophy. There were no Khalsa schools / colleges. Also, there were no costly *keertan darbars* in the name of preaching Sikh faith; there were no wasteful processions we observe in every city, every year. But still, then people got the motivation to become Sikh and joined the Khalsa Panth in large numbers. Moreover, anybody, who wanted to be a Sikh, knew that he is risking his life and opting for living under very harsh conditions. Sikhs were hunted by the police and to help them, intelligence reports were given regarding their whereabouts by the greedy guys to get rewards from the officials. Even then not only Hindus but the ruling Muslims also adopted Sikh faith (Alam Khan of Sirhind becoming Alam Singh).

There must be some reason for people to embrace Sikh faith under those conditions. It is said that the life of a person speaks louder than the words. During those days the life of every Sikh was more effective than the preachings of many professional *parcharaks* of today. Sikhs lived an ideal and upright life, always speaking truth and helping the needy. We have the writings of Quazi-Noor Mohammad and other non-Sikh historians to make us feel proud of the character of the Sikhs. Also think of the freeing of 2000 non-Sikh girls in 1761 from the clutches of Abdali by the Khalsa at the risk of their own lives and escorting them safely back to their parents in Delhi. The price, the Khalsa paid for the kind act of protecting the life and honour of those helpless girls, is the highest one ever paid in the world, the blood of half of the Sikh nation and demolition of the Golden temple in 1762. As a result of the saint-soldier character of the Khalsa, the public developed love, respect and also

sympathy for the Sikhs. Because of the honour, cooperation and support they earned from the public, they were able to first control most of the rural areas and later they soon became the masters of Punjab.

"We must learn a lesson from this history and live the ideal life of a Sikh. A true Sikh must behave like the 18<sup>th</sup> century Sikhs, the well-wishers of society (*sarbat ka bhala*) and he must earn his living honestly. However, our politicians, of whatever creed they are, are believed to be corrupt persons, cheats and liars. Sikh officials are reported to be no less corrupt than non-Sikhs "Further there are so many *deras* and *sants* each preaching his own brand of *gurmat*; some preaching even Hindu *karam kand* under the label of *gurmat*, *amrit* ceremony by them does not mean admitting Sikhs to the Khalsa Panth but registering their own *sewaks*, followers.... go to any marriage function, the wedding procession comes drunk and dancing; serving alcohol has become a symbol of being modern and great..., all anti-Sikh practices.

"Now tell me how can any young person who when he listens to such a degrading image of the Sikhs possess the pride of being a Sikh and, therefore, desire to look like a Sikh

The only answer is that we should ourselves be leading a life of true Sikh to impress upon the youth to respect the Sikh way of life. This is the solution to overcome the problem of apostasy.

If every Sikh, whether a leader, a preacher or a commoner, decides to live and behave like a true Sikh, the glory of the 18<sup>th</sup> century will return to us. During that period, they did not orally preach to others (as is the custom today through paid preachers) but they lived the

Sikh life. An old story can explain this. A raja believed his people loved him sincerely. The wazir disagreed with the raja and told him that people only appear to be so. When the raja wanted him to prove his assumption, the wazir sent a notification that raja wants his tank full of milk and every citizen should put one jug of milk during the night. In the morning, the tank was full with water instead of milk. Every citizen thought that others will bring milk and his water, when mixed with that, will be considered as milk.

The same way many Sikhs assume that the rest of the community will make the sacrifice of living like an 18<sup>th</sup> century Sikh and they will get the honour of being great by just claiming to be a Sikh.



## Are You a Sikh ?

Once I visited Guru Nanak Mission Gurdwara, Springfield, Maryland, (Washington D.C.). A young couple that was living not far from the gurdwara invited me to spend one week with them. In modern terminology, I will define them as *pucca* Sikhs.

One evening, the husband returned home happy and smiling. Without being asked about it, he voluntarily started narrating his story:

“I must tell you something very good, which I observed today. I was waiting for my turn in the clinic of our family physician. A European lady entered the clinic. Without observing normal courtesy or any formality, she went straight to the doctor talking to a patient, and asked him, "Are you Dr. Singh?" The physician and the patients were all surprised. However, the doctor, instead of telling her to sit & wait, said, 'Yes.'”

With an abnormal expression on her face, she started pouring words out of her mouth in a fast flowing stream, "I was in Delhi. I know Singhs, they are good people. I read Singh on your name-plate and came in to

see you, but you are without a turban. How come you have written the word Singh on your name-plate? I tell you to either wear your turban or remove the word Singh from your name." As soon as she finished, she turned and walked out of the door.

She left as quickly as she had dropped in. No one spoke; all of us mutely observed this episode which took place in a flash.

With pleasure visible on his face, my host continued, "Professor Sahib! She was a brave lady who bluntly told the doctor to wear a turban. I always thought like that but did not know how to say it to him. Whenever I visited him, I always wished he wore his turban to bring a good name to the Sikh community."

When I was teaching at the Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, the wife of a friend of mine narrated a very embarrassing episode during a courtesy visit to our house. When she and her family reached the local railway station to depart on vacation, her husband went straight to the ticket window to purchase their tickets while she watched their luggage.

As the passengers in the queue seemed common people, her husband, being a University professor, felt he could jump the queue. So he walked straight to the ticket window. A *sardar jee* standing in the queue yelled from behind, "*Babu jee!* Come back and join the queue. We also want to purchase our tickets." His wife did not relish the words *babu jee* for her professor husband with a Ph.D. from a foreign university. She tried to correct him saying, "ਓਹ ਭੀ ਸਰਦਾਰ ਜੀ ਹੈ, ਬਾਬੂ ਜੀ ਨਹੀਂ - He too is a *sardar jee*, and not *babu jee*."

To her embarrassment, however, quick came the

reply, "ਬੀਬੀ ਜੀ, ਤੁਹਾਨੂੰ ਤਾਂ ਇਸ ਨੇ ਨਾਲ ਰਖਿਆ ਹੈ, ਪਰ ਸਰਦਾਰੀ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਤੇ ਗੁਆ ਆਇਆ ਹੈ - He is keeping you with him but where did he lose his *sardarhood*, (*sardari*, turban, his identity)?" She had no reply. Meanwhile with a little pause, the passenger continued, "ਪੱਗ ਬੰਨ੍ਹੋਗਾ, ਤਾਂ ਹੀ ਕੋਈ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਸਰਦਾਰ ਮੰਨ ਸਕੇਗਾ! - He will be believed to be a *sardar jee* only if he wears a turban."

Finally she told us, "You know he is a Sikh from inside, and is proud of his *Sikhi*, I wish he wears a turban so that people identify him as *sardar jee* and not as *babu jee*."

**No Crown, No King  
No Turban, No Singh**





"Why are you carrying a dagger?"

## Kirpan not Dagger

"Why are you carrying a dagger?"  
asking this question to a Sikh is wrong.

"Friends, I hope all of you will agree with me that we are not *carrying* our shirts and pants, but we are *wearing* them. This (*Kirpan* in the sling), is an article of my faith. I wear it, I do not *carry* it. Further, it is not a dagger, but a *Kirpan*.

We know that robbers carry daggers to kill and rob people. However, the Sikhs wear *Kirpans* to protect people.

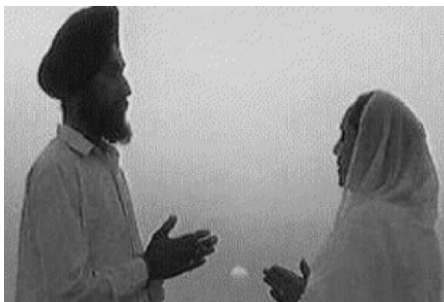
Wearing of the *Kirpan* by a Sikh, can be explained by an analogy to the wearing of a pistol by a police man. Robbers carry pistols to rob people or even kill them. On the other hand, policemen use pistols not to kill people, but to protect them. Therefore, the policemen are required to wear them to perform their duty and as a part of their uniform. Sikhs are Sant-Sipahis (holy policemen), hence they are required to wear *Kirpans* as a part of their *panj*

*kakaar* (5-K) uniform to be reminded of the responsibility of their faith to protect people.

The Guru had a very solid reason to coin a new name, *Kirpan*, for this article of the Sikh faith; *Kirpan* means a weapon for doing a favor to the people and protect their honor. The name reflects the mission for which a Sikh wears it. A Sikh is to publicly agree under oath before the *Panj Pyaras* for its genuine use before he is allowed to wear it.

On the same analogy, the name of the pistol should be changed to *protectil*, when it is given to policemen for protecting and keeping peace. This new name will also reveal the mission of the police. It will provide them the psychology of service and motivate them for the right use of the equipment. "Now, one know that a Sikh does not carry a dagger (weapon), but he wears a *Kirpan*."





## Sin of 'Breaking' Amrit

Once I was invited to the gurdwara in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada for a Sunday function. When I was leaving the gurdwara, a young Sikh whispered in my ears, “*Baba ji*, I have a question,” He continued, “I live in northern Canada and I am in serious trouble. I shall have to commit the sin of 'breaking' my *amrit*. We were told to recite *Rehras* at sunset and get up three hours before sunrise to do our morning *nitnem*. At the place, where I live, the sun sets after 10 pm and the sun rises much earlier than 5 am. It is not possible for me to get up at 2 am when we sleep at 11 pm or so. I shall have to sleep longer and my *amrit* will 'break'. What can I do?”

As soon as he started speaking, I understood his problem. I continued listening to him patiently. We had already discussed this question in Quesnel, about 500 miles north of Vancouver. The nights there, too, are quite short during summer. If we move further north we enter the polar zone, where there is 6-month day and 6-month night, technically one day in a year, because the sun rises and sets only once in a whole year. At whatever latitude

we may live, we generally divide our daily cycle in three sections, 8 hours for work, 8 hours for sleep, and 8 hours for routine chores with minor modifications according to the seasons and personal lifestyle.

The young man was visibly relieved of his worries and of the tension in his mind, when I explained to him the rising and setting of the sun. I told him, “*Maryada* directions are general guidelines. They mean that we recite our *Rehras* before our evening meals. After a full night sleep, we must wake up in the morning so that we have sufficient time for completing our *nitnem* before we take our breakfast and go to work. Do not care at what time the sun rises or sets, you go on with your normal routine as directed by your watch.”

I could understand the feeling of relief in the mind of the young man when he called my host in the evening to express his thanks again to me for explaining the *maryada* to him.





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## Why No Palki in Darbar Sahib ?

Why is there no *palki* for the *parkash* of Guru Granth Sahib in Darbar Sahib (Amritsar)?"

During the period of the Gurus, kings used high quality horses, elephants or *palkis* for their ride. *Palki* was used to provide the king the comfort and the honor while moving from one place to the other.

"In the Sikh tradition, we read about the use of the *palki* for the first time when Guru Arjun Dev is mentioned to have brought the sacred four *pothis* containing *gurbani* (They were later known as Baba Mohan Pothis) from Goindwal to Amritsar."

"The king, as a judge does today, held his court while sitting on an open throne fully visible to his audience and not when sitting in a *palki*. Accordingly, while conducting a *diwan*, we always install Guru Granth Sahib on a *manji* (a throne, and not in a *palki*) with a canopy on the top and accompanied by a *Chaur*. *Gurbani* is a spiritual eternal Guru, the true king, hence we always adopt full protocol due to a king, whenever a *diwan*, court of the Guru, is held. The *palki*, as during the days of

Gurus, is used every day only to carry Guru Granth Sahib from the Akal Takht to Sri Darbar Sahib for the *keertan diwan* there. In the same way, *palki* is also used to bring Guru Granth Sahib back to the Akal Takht at night."

"Then why do all the gurdwaras in Vancouver do *parkash* of Guru Granth Sahib in a *palki* ?"

It is because of the ignorance of the managements of the gurdwaras that they submit to the misplaced enthusiasm of some members to install a *palki*. They wrongly believe that a more impressive and a more costly *palki* means more respect for the Guru.

However, some volunteer *sewadars*, who clean the *diwan* hall, place a large number of swords, spears, *chakars* etc in front of Guru Granth Sahib. They are arranged every week in different decorative positions in the place between *golak* and *manji sahib*. The mind cannot avoid the impression of these decorations before concentrating on Guru Granth Sahib.

People visit gurdwara for paying their respect to Guru Granth Sahib and reflect on the message of *gurbani*. They do not come to be entertained by flower arrangements and decorations. The view of Guru Granth Sahib cannot be reduced to a secondary position by the attractive and excessive decorations.

Decorations in gurdwara around the *palki* and *manji sahib* have become so prominent that the mind of the visitors is caught by them. Also, one finds it difficult to listen to *keertan* attentively and reflect on *gurbani* teaching.







## Are the Janam Sakhis True?

All *sakhis*, as is already known to the readers, have more than one version, sometimes even with different basic facts. Before we discuss the truthfulness regarding these *sakhis*, I share with you an episode experienced at a Sikh youth camp; from this episode I learnt, how to understand and believe a *sakhi*.

I was surprised, rather became tense and got worried, to find the *sakhi* of Guru Nanak and Sajjan thug being made un-believable when retold by a young trainee, a second grade student. The student stated, "There was a *highway* from Lahore to Multan (both cities are now in Pakistan); Sajjan built a *motel* on the highway.", "The travellers forgot their toothpaste tubes and tooth brushes..."

It was clear to me that the student, to make the *sakhi* understandable to the *sangat*, 'corrected' it by using the current words to convey the meaning of the story. Not only did he modify the words, he also added his own experience to make the *sakhi* a natural happening and thus convince the audience to believe it. He adopted the word *highway* to replace the word *major road* used by me and

the word *sarai* (inn) was changed to *motel* (a hotel for the motorists on the highway).

These changes, introduced by the students, made the *sakhi* improbable because there were no highways or motels during those days in Punjab. In addition, the toothpaste and brushes were not known then at all.

When the boy finished his talk, it was my turn to explain the 'mistakes' made by the young student. I stated, "*Sangat ji*, we have listened to the boy and observed his enthusiasm to convince us about the correctness of the *sakhi*. To make the *sakhi* acceptable to us, not only did he replace some words but also added his own experience. *These honest changes, instead of assuring us about the truth of the sakhi, as intended by him, made the historical base of the sakhi doubtful, rather improbable.*"

## How the / versions changed

"Modern scholars agree that the narrators do inject their personal bias while describing a story heard or read by them. Because of the personal mindset of the listener, he/she interprets the same version differently. By the time, the fifth person tells the sixth listener a new version, different from the one told by the first person, is created. The first narrator on listening to that version denies having told that story."

Dear reader, now think of the *sakhis* related to Guru Nanak during his *udasis* to different parts of Asia meeting people of different ethnicities, different cultures and different beliefs. The *sakhis* spread orally from one person to the other, from one culture to another, and from one generation to the next. This continued until the sixth Nanak, Guru Hargobind, when the *sakhis* were for the first time recorded on paper. A very large number of

versions were created by that time. This is confirmed by the study of about a half dozen old (original) *janam sakhis* and their later copies that are available to us. We find today that not only were those *sakhis* re-written with the writers' imagination changing the original words and statements to express their own belief, but also many new *sakhis* continued to be added to them. The popular Bhai Bala Janam Sakhi written in 1658 had 75 *sakhis* and its copy written in 1820 has 130 *sakhis* (I am told it has now 500 *sakhis*; obviously, many *sakhis* were added by the later writers to make the book better than the previous one).

If we want to know the correct version of the *Vaisakhi* of 1699, it would not be possible. Even if the original record of the episode written by one of the *Panj Pyaras* were available to us today, the authors and narrators, who describe it to the masses, would create many versions of the same *sakhi* because each would interpret it differently, according to his own inner belief and feelings. The listeners accept that version which appeals to their minds and they share it with other people by further changing the emphasis.

### Faulty Transmission

"One day when we were watching TV, the pictures suddenly disappeared, and only the moving lines were visible on the screen. My grandson wanted to adjust the antenna placed on the TV box. I told him not to touch the antenna because he had not done anything to disturb it. Soon the lines stopped and there was a message on the screen : *Do not adjust your TV, the transmission is faulty.*"

"We should not adjust the details of the *sakhis* to

'correct' them, we should accept that their transmission is faulty. Continuous additions, deletions, modifications, and re-interpretations of the *sakhis* make them doubtful. Sometimes new *sakhis* are created which are even against the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib or which lower the status of the Gurus to just that of magicians. Do not get concerned about the details of the *sakhis* to investigate their being true or not. The objective of narrating *sakhis* is to tell us the teachings of *gurbani* as revealed through the lives of the Gurus. Just understand the lesson, which fits with the message of *gurbani*. Ignore the details, or even the whole *sakhi* if its message goes against *gurbani*. Do not try to correct the *sakhi* to make it believable. Otherwise, you will further distort and create more doubts about the Sikh history."

To my surprise at a camp in USA, one young student involuntarily drew the same conclusion and in a very convincing way. When one student asked me, "*Baba ji*, are these *sakhis* true?", the other boy immediately reacted, "Is the story of the race between hare and tortoise true?" Hearing him, the class got attentive and I was anxious to hear his further comments. The boy continued, "Just learn the moral lesson and forget the details, they are designed by the writer/narrator of the *sakhi* only to explain the message

1. Like faith, *sakhis* are there in science too and they have their own significance. To give an example, every student of science is told how Archimedes was emotionally taken over by the joy of his discovery. He ran naked out of the bathtub to tell his discovery of the principle of floating bodies. He found that articles when in water lose weight equivalent to the weight of water displaced by them. The students of science value only

this principle discovered by the scientist and do not get involved in the details of the episode connected with the discovery because the details may or may not be historically true.

They ask, “Were the people waiting at his door to hear his discovery?” The statement actually expresses his high emotional feelings at his sudden incidental discovery. For us to understand from the story is the aspect of his emotional feelings, the details are designed to express those feelings; hence, scientists believe and utilize his discovery but do not care about the story of his discovery.

Similarly, the students of faith (spirituality) are expected to learn and value the lesson of a *sakhi* and not get stuck with the details of the episode used to describe it. There are some *sakhis* common in many religions. The words used to describe them are coined to make the *sakhi* interesting and attractive to the listeners. That is why they change from one tradition to the other. The moral lesson, which needs to be valued, however, remains the same.

### Historical base of Sakhis

Most of the *sakhis* have a historical base but it gets modified every time it is re-written or re-told to make it acceptable in the new locale. Let it be repeated again that we, the devotees should value the spiritual principle (moral) preached by the *sakhi*. However, in many cases we, particularly laymen, ignore the principle and get impressed by the details of the *sakhi* which are stated to make it impressionable and understandable to a layperson.

In some cases, we may not agree with the details

accepting them to be just a mythology and hence fail to benefit from a *sakhi*. We should not try to devalue the message of the *sakhi* because commonsense does not accept its historicity.

### Amalgamation of both history and mythology

*Sakhi* literature is a perfect and beautiful amalgamation of both history and mythology. It is also colored with the love of the author for the Gurus and their unlimited holy powers. The writers, while recording the life of the Gurus, also included as many episodes as they knew about other holy men, particularly the miracles associated with them. The *Janam Sakhi* literature should be studied keeping these facts in mind. To treat it as history written by a historian and attempt to evaluate its correctness is misreading the text and losing the benefits of its study. Such scholars not only confuse themselves about the historical contents of the *sakhis* but they also misguide their readers about what the *sakhis* really intend to tell us.

In some cases, the lesson of the *sakhi* may not agree with the message of *gurbani*, rather it may be against the teachings of *gurbani*, such *sakhis* may be rejected lock, stock and barrel.

ਹੁਕਮੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਤਾ ਨਿਰਮਲੁ ਹੋਵੈ ਹਉਮੈ ਵਿਚਹੁ ਜਾਏ ॥  
ਗੁਰ ਕੀ ਸਾਖੀ ਸਹਜੇ ਚਾਖੀ ਤ੍ਰਿਸਨਾ ਅਗਨਿ ਬੁਝਾਏ ॥

*When a person is blessed by God, his/her ego is destroyed and the mind is sanctified. His mind is calmed, he listens to the teachings of the Guru, and the fire of his desires is extinguished.*





## Is Mercy Killing (Euthanasia) Allowed?

Sikh students have formed their associations in almost every university in Canada. Once, I was to address the Sikh youth association at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

One student gave me a great surprise when he asked, “We want to know from you the Sikh philosophy regarding euthanasia (mercy killing) and life on plug (keeping the patient alive through supporting gadgets). We have heard the views of different religions on these topics. They do not satisfy us. We are divided on this issue. Tell us what Sikhism has to say regarding this.”

I told them, “There is no direct answer in Gurbani about these questions, but we can discuss the answer according to the general directions given in the hymns. We may be able to understand some aspects of these issues to make our own decision.”

I told the students, “We are supposed to serve the sick and helpless. Doing *sewa* is our duty. Some people want to end the life when it actually is nothing but suffering as is the case with terminally ill people. By doing this, they just want to save them from pain and agony. Gurbani does not permit killing a human being or committing suicide to save

oneself from the pain or problems of life. Giving pain may be God's way of teaching lessons to those who suffer and also those who serve such people. We must follow the principle of doing *sewa* as long as a person is breathing. I think, therefore, that euthanasia is against the Sikh faith.

***There is no place for mercy-killing in Sikhism.*** The Gurus tackled the problem of sickness and suffering by providing medical relief and alleviation of pain. Guru Arjan Dev Ji built a lepers home at Tarn-Taran. Guru Har Rai Ji established a hospital at Kiratpur. It is reported that he supplied a rare herb to emperor Shahjahan for the serious illness of his son Dara Shikoh. After all suffering is a part of the human condition and has a place in God's scheme. Suffering also prompts man to turn his thoughts to God; ***"Suffering is a medicine; happiness is a disease."***

The Gurus rejected suicide, as it is an interference in God's plan. Many Sikhs faced torture and ultimate death at the hands of tyrant rulers and fanatic leaders, though they could have found relief through suicide. Birth and death are the prerogatives of God and under His command, and it is no business of man to oppose the Divine Will.

Artificial plug-life makes the patient suffer longer. Some of them who are made to remain in a vegetative state for months are actually not living. The plug may be pulled off in such type of patients. Artificial heart and lung support may be justified only when a person has a chance to be cured from the illness. Otherwise, keeping a person breathing with modern technology is prolonging his pain. It is not desirable to keep a patient alive artificially when it is known that he will not be able to live his life. Before concluding, let me remind you that these are my personal observations. Further, I agree with you that Sikh theologians need to sit together to discuss such issues and come to a joint decision for the guidance of the community.







## Virtues, Vices and Their Clash

The history of all religious traditions reveals that though all religions preach truth but falsehood continues to rule the world. Some people question when God, believed to be true personification of virtues, created this world, why are there vices, pains and problems. The philosophical answer given to this dilemma is that every coin has its opposite side as well. Sense of light is there only because darkness is also there. In the absence of darkness, the word 'light' will not give us any meaning. Light means absence of darkness and vice versa.

The sociologists tell us that if virtues are not 'sown' in the mind, vices occupy that vacant (idle) mind. Therefore, they have given us a famous proverb, "An idle man's brain is a devil's workshop".

Developing virtues and practicing truth in our daily life is not only very much desirable, but an essential human trait for maintaining peace in society. However, it is an uphill task, one needs a very strong mind having willingness to 'suffer and make sacrifices to tread on this path. Hence those who dare to adopt truthful living are known as brave and great souls.

Today, however, we find that the Sikhs too have

forgotten their virtuous lives. Though this good character continues to be reflected in the lives of many individuals and some small groups but as a community, Sikhs, like followers of other faiths, seem to have lost their will to make sacrifices for protecting the human rights of the weak. Their leaders, both political and religious, are deeply divided on many issues. There are dozens of religious sects and political groups who are no less un-scrupulous, selfish or corrupt than other communities. The shine and glory of the community seems to have faded away.

The Sikh preachers also have developed many different, and in some cases contradictory, interpretations of the faith, under the pressure of ego and preservation of self-identity. There are many centers, deras, of the Sikh preachers (usually addressed as Sants, babas) practicing their own code of rehat, different from the one approved by their central body, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, Amritsar. This has resulted in the division of the community into many sects (religious groups) each claiming superiority over the others.

Further, love of the Sikhs for their caste (abolished by the founder of the Sikh faith) has replaced their love for the faith. The labels of Ramgarhias, Ravidasis, Khatri, Jats etc., have re-emerged among them. Even the Gurdwaras carry the caste names. The main stream of the Sikhs in Punjab, their homeland, is also split into regional groups.

### Need for Preaching Values of Virtues

Sikhism, however, is a modern faith and its original message (gurbani) is available to the community. For the sake of world peace (a duty given to them by the founders), the Sikhs should give up their ego, sit together and unite to preach and practice the teachings of gurbani. The teachings should be aimed to overcome hatred and violence as was

done earlier in Punjab by their predecessors. The basic gurbani philosophy is adoptable by whole humanity to live in peace while maintaining their own identity, culture and customs.

In majority of the cases, it is not lack of knowledge of the basic tenets of the faith but lack of commitment to respect the principles of the faith. Adopting a virtuous life is a really hard job; it needs a devoted mind and willingness to go against the present day trend. We humans are susceptible to built-in-pressure of vices like lust, ego etc. Use of alcohol and drugs are common. High social and moral values are ignored, indiscretion and permissiveness prevails in all cultures.

This life style is strictly prohibited for a Sikh; however, general carelessness about their faith is also seen among them both in India and abroad.

### **The Sikh Character**

The nature of the gurmat philosophy is such that it has created a unique nation. Sikhs possess the spirit to sacrifice everything for the welfare of humanity and protecting human rights. They respect the dignity of the weak and helpless, particularly of the women who have been degraded by the teachings of ancient religions.

Mission of a Sikh is welfare of whole humanity, irrespective of an individual's category, caste, creed, country etc. At the same time, he aims to become an ideal human being by living on honest earnings, howsoever meager they may be. He believes that one loses one's faith if he takes away the rights of other people. He lives a humble life retaining his self-esteem and high spirits.

He knows human life is a gift from God to be spent in His love, and selfless service to humanity. Therefore, he does not hesitate to sacrifice it for the sake of

protecting/practicing truth. This training was received by him during the lives of the Gurus. Therefore there is need of adopting gurmat philosophy of universal love for all human beings. It builds the character of a person to maintain and defend peace in the world. The sword in the hands of a Sikh is not a weapon for violence but it is used as a police man's pistol for maintaining peace. It fights against the tyrant and scares away the aggressor to protect the law abiding citizens.

### **An Important Appeal to the Khalsa**

Let it also be accepted by the Panth that unfortunately, the modern wind of greed, selfishness and ego sweeping all over the world has also involved the Sikhs. It is time for them to get motivated by the pristine glory of their faith and heritage and to develop the character/virtues preached in gurbani. The history details the high moral standards practiced by our elders. There are today innumerable number of Sikh organizations and individual Sikhs who are maintaining the standards of the Khalsa as expected from them by the Gurus. What we need is popularizing these virtues among the leaders and also the Sikh masses, so that the community earns the same image for which it was founded and which it had enjoyed earlier.

This value system of the Khalsa and their sacrifices when practiced and demonstrated to society today, will surely have a snowball effect and motivate more people to join them. Remember Khalsa ji! This will involve replacement of our ego and greed with sewa and humility. Let us accept this, God will bless us and bestow peace on humanity.





